CARLSBAD PROJECT WATER OPERATIONS & WATER SUPPLY CONSERVATION EIS
PROJECT BACKGROUND FACT SHEET

Federal involvement in the Pecos River Basin began in 1905 with authorization of the Carlsbad Project. US Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) diverts to storage and delivers Carlsbad Project water for the benefit of the Carlsbad Irrigation District (CID). Reclamation's Carlsbad Project facilities on the Pecos River now include Sumner Dam, Brantley Dam, and Avalon Dam. Reclamation and CID are also permitted to store Carlsbad Project water in Santa Rosa Lake provided total storage in all four reservoirs does not exceed 176,500 acre-feet. The Fort Sumner Diversion Dam is owned by Reclamation, but it is not associated with the Carlsbad Project. The Fort Summer Irrigation District (FSID) operates the facility and holds title to all water rights diverted at the dam. FSID has no storage right, but its right to divert water from the river is senior to the Carlsbad Project's right to divert to storage.

Water is typically moved from Santa Rosa or Sumner Dam in block releases which are the most efficient way to move water downstream. If a small amount of water is released or if water is released slowly, a larger percentage of the delivery is lost to evaporation or other losses in transit. If too large a percentage of the delivery is lost, a release becomes wasteful and violates state law. The timing of releases is generally determined by CID in accordance with irrigation needs, but water is sometimes released for flood control, dam safety or established storage limits.

In 1987, the Pecos bluntnose shiner (shiner) was listed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service as a threatened species and approximately 101 miles of the Pecos River were designated as the shiner's critical habitat. Sustained releases from Sumner Dam in 1989 to test the safety of the newly constructed Brantley Dam adversely affected the shiner. Reclamation consulted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and received a biological opinion from them in 1991 indicating that operation of Reclamation's Pecos River facilities was jeopardizing the continued existence of the shiner.

The Pecos bluntnose shiner is a federally protected species under the Endangered Species Act

In 1992, Reclamation began a cooperative research program aimed at determining how to meet the needs of the shiner and downstream water users. Through a multi-agency collaborative effort, a hydrologic model has been developed for analyzing the effects of changes in operations on the various affected resources. The model developed for the Pecos River represents all the key processes in the Pecos River Basin and simulates operations. Since that time Reclamation has continued to consult with the US Fish and Wildlife Service on its operations and has experimented with changes in operations to

better meet the needs of the shiner. Beginning in 1998, the Carlsbad Project has been bypassing water when available and needed to provide a continuous river. To do this, Reclamation acquires water rights from willing sellers or lessors to replace water that would otherwise be available if operational changes were not made. Reclamation does not have the discretion to prevent water it bypasses from being diverted by senior water rights holders below Sumner Dam. Endangered Species Act compliance on current operations is guided by a three-year biological opinion from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, which will expire on February 28, 2006. Formal consultation with the USFWS began in August 2005 with the submittal of a biological assessment. Reclamation will seek a biological opinion for long-term operation of the Carlsbad Project that both conserves the shiner and keeps Carlsbad Project water supply whole.

Proposed changes in the Carlsbad Project include bypassing available inflows through Santa Rosa and Sumner Dams to meet target flows or minimum flows as measured at either the Taiban Gage or Acme Gage. The alternatives also incorporate certain actions common to all, such as acquiring water, changing protocols for block releases, continuing the use of a fish conservation pool to ensure river flow, and an adaptive management plan for monitoring and addressing river conditions and ensuring that the chosen alternative meets the project purpose and need.

A variety of options for acquiring additional water for the Carlsbad Project or providing flows for direct benefit of the shiner are also analyzed. These options include purchasing or leasing water rights; combined with retiring land, fallowing, and/or developing well fields. Other options would encourage changes in cropping patterns or pumping water to the river from existing wells or an abandoned gravel pit. Reclamation will use these options to develop specific water acquisition proposals, which may require additional permitting, consultations, congressional authorization, and NEPA analysis. In all cases, Reclamation actions must be in accordance with its existing federal and state legal and statutory authorities and obligations, the Pecos River Compact, water rights, and contractual obligations. Reclamation would continue to work with irrigation districts and water users to implement these options on a voluntary buyer/seller relationship, respecting existing water rights and priorities in the Pecos River Basin.


Operations of Sumner Dam are assessed in the EIS

The alternatives and water acquisition options were formulated and screened through a collaborative process involving multiple agencies, stakeholders, and technical working groups. Please submit comments or questions to the Bureau of Reclamation point of contact, Ms. Marsha Carra, at (505) 462-3602, mcarra@uc.usbr.gov.